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PRESIDENCY

Russian personnel and structural changes reflect electoral concerns?

President Putin issued a decree last month that raised red flags, not only for its content, but for its timing, as well. Just after regional elections were held across Russia, Putin created the Federal Service for the Mass Media—melding the Federal Service for Media Law Compliance and Cultural Heritage (Rosookhrankultura) and the Federal Information Technologies Agency (Rossvyaznadzor). The new agency will regulate a variety of media (print, television, radio and internet), controlling both the issuance of licenses and the content broadcast by these media. (1)

Particularly for the televised media, whose freedom of operation (from ownership to content) repeatedly and systematically has been curtailed by the Putin administration, the new agency represents an extra level of regulatory hoops, as well as a new set of regulators, to contend with in licensing. There is some speculation that this presidential decree represents an attempt to mediate a bureaucratic dispute in broadcast licensing, as outlets begin to switch to digital. (2)

The issue of Internet control is another element of this new agency's oversight that is reminiscent of SORM and SORM-2 and the earlier attempts (dating back to the Yel'tsin administration) by FAPSI and the FSB to regulate the Internet in Russia by compelling media outlets to purchase equipment that allowed the FSB to conduct surveillance through mobile and wireless devices, and other Internet access points. (3)
Russia's Information Security Doctrine, endorsed in 2000, addresses some key issues in control over media sources that may speak volumes to the timing of Putin's recent decree. Mindful of the Russian response to the Orange and Rose revolutions, particularly Moscow's claims of foreign interference, remarks by President Putin and then-Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov at the time of the release of the Information Security Doctrine seem either prescient or paranoid. In outlining the need for an aggressive Information Security Doctrine, Putin identified the role of information in projecting global leadership: "information resources and infrastructure have become an arena for the struggle for world leadership. It is obvious that in such a complex sphere as information, controversy between states might arise." (4)

At one of the Security Council sessions where the doctrine was discussed, Sergei Ivanov stressed the importance of the ability of the state to have its voice heard in the media: "the state has lately lost the potentialities for clarifying its politics, the state's position on domestic and foreign political issues." (5)

It seems possible that Putin's team found something in the coverage of the recent regional elections to be either unacceptable or uncontrollable and acted to exert tighter supervision. In any event, centralization of control for its own sake apparently is an esteemed objective in Putin's Kremlin.

Of course, at the time of the creation of the information security doctrine and announcement of SORM regulations, at least Russia had different security organs in control of the surveillance and content regulations, and therefore had a semblance of counterbalance to a single authority's decisions in the critical sphere of mass communications. However, with the absorption of FAPSI (in particular its supervision and authority over the electronic information, emergency and electoral systems nationwide) into the FSB, the position of "Chekhists" within the Russian government, characterized by one respected analyst as "stable,"
could now perhaps be seen as secure. (6) Despite its seeming unassailable position, it is clear the Kremlin is seeking to sew up any loose threads that might lead to their undoing in elections next year.

**Personnel moves come fast and furious**

Putin's decision to move Sergei Ivanov from the Defense Ministry to a First Deputy post in the Government has captured a great deal of attention in the debate over possible presidential successors. However, there has been a series of lesser publicized changes that may speak just as loudly to the future governance of Russia.

Perhaps most notably, the long time head of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Alexander Veshnyakov, was ousted from his post hard on the heels of the March regional elections. Veshnyakov described his last meeting with Putin, where they discussed the regional elections and in which Veshnyakov told Putin he was ready to continue his work at the CEC. Within a few days, when Putin submitted his list of candidates for the CEC, it did not include the current chairman. Apparently, Putin did not inform Veshnyakov of his intentions. According to Veshnyakov, "The decision was not made then. Now it has been made." (7)

For the new term, Putin appointed Igor Borisov, Stanislav Vavilov, Vasili Volkov, Maya Grishina and Igor Fyodorov as his representatives to the CEC. (8) His selection to head up the Commission is, perhaps not surprisingly, an associate from St. Petersburg, Vladimir Churov, who served as Putin's Deputy in the 1990s, when Putin was Senior Deputy to St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoli Sobchak. (9)

Another election bellwether industry, arms sales, clearly was shaken by the removal of Sergei Ivanov from the Defense Ministry. Although his position as First Deputy Prime Minister provides for general oversight of the military sector of
the economy, Ivanov's departure appears to have provided an opportunity for others to scramble for more hands-on control. Prime Minister Fradkov, who, as has been noted previously, clearly sees his position as elevated with the president's decision to pit Medvedev and Ivanov directly against each other in the government, recently put his own appointee, Aleksandr Denisov, at the head of the Federal Agency for the Delivery of Arms and Special Equipment. (10)

The head of Russia's main arms export agency, Rosoboroneksport, also seems to be making some political noise. Sergei Chemezov, a longtime Putin associate, recently announced that he is setting up an organization, comprised in part of the Russian Machine Builders Union, which, at its creation, will entail approximately 80 companies from the military industrial complex, shipbuilding sectors and select banking concerns. (11)

It is interesting to note that diverse streams of income and outflow from arms sales tend to suggest a real contest for succession within the Russian political and security elite, especially when so many other elements of the state are grasping for stricter central oversight. When control of such a prodigious industry is in a variety of hands, it becomes more difficult to ensure an orderly, managed succession. Perhaps for this very reason, the leaders of Yel'tsin's administration in the late 1990s fought to reconsolidate control of military equipment transfers. It is too early to project the continued success of these independent revenue sources and therefore elite successor candidates; it certainly remains a possibility that Putin and his team will decide to reassert Kremlin control via one single agency. The issue then may prove to be whether or not the industry responds to the Kremlin's directives.

Source Notes:

(1) "Russian president decrees to merge two federal supervision services," ITAR-TASS, 12 Mar 07; OSC Transcribed text via World News Connection; "Super

(2) "Not so great expectations," Ibid.

(3) Moscow Rossiiskaya gazeta in Russian 29 Aug 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0829 via ISCIP Database. For more on SORM and SORM-2, please see The NIS Observed archives, searchable via www.bu.edu/iscip.

(4) "President Outlines Objectives of new Doctrine," Moscow ITAR-TASS in Russian 1218 GMT 23 Jun 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0623 via ISCIP Database.

(5) Moscow ITAR-TASS in English 1454 GMT 23 Jun 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0623 via ISCIP Database.


(7) "Two terms in office to be unwritten rule for CEC Chief—Veshnyakov," ITAR-TASS, 15 Mar 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.

(8) Ibid.

(9) "Nothing is more important than your background," by Boris Vishnevsky, Novaya Gazeta, No. 22, March 29, 2007, p. 9; What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(10) "Denisov Appointed to Head Arms Delivery Agency," Interfax, 26 Mar 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.

(11) "Chemezov's party," By Natalia Melikova, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 30 Mar 07; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe; Also, report of Melikova article by Financial Times Information; BBC Monitoring International Reports, 3 Apr 07. (See The ISCIP Analyst, particularly 25 Jan 07 issue at www.bu.edu/iscip for information on the Putin-Chemezov connection.)

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
Whatever happened to Kukly?

A new television series has aired in Russia over the past several months. Titled Stalin Live, the series depicts Stalin, near the end of his life, looking back over key moments. Included in those moments is a scene that dramatizes a fictional Stalin bidding an emotional farewell to his son Yakov before Yakov heads to the front in World War II. "If you have to die, do it with dignity," says Stalin in Georgian. "And you must be confident that your father, Stalin, will do everything for our victory." (1)

Stalin Live's director, Grigori Lyubomirov, is an unexpected face to find behind the new series. Lyubomirov was the director of NTV's Kukly, the puppet show whose political satire eventually got it ousted from NTV's line-up, apparently after objections were raised by Putin himself. Lyubomirov's other contributions include Russia's first reality television show, Behind Glass (Za Steklom), and, more recently, Rublyovka, a show depicting the ultra-rich inhabitants of Moscow's Rublyovskoye Shosse.

Sources for the Stalin Live series include historical accounts, among them interviews given by Stalin's bodyguards. Director Grigori Lyubomirov commented about the show's sympathetic viewpoint. "According to the information that we have, Stalin in the last months of his life came to repentance. He rethought his life from the position of a man of faith," said Lyubomirov. (2)

The show reflects a rising interest in alternative portrayals of the Stalinist legacy, certainly a very political issue during Khrushchev's reign, and one which saw numerous revelations in the glasnost' era. Current attitudes toward Stalin seem to reflect more ambivalence toward or approval of the dictator than disapprobation. A study conducted by Sarah Mendelson and Theodore Gerber unearthed some interesting findings. According to the two scholars, "about half
(51 percent) of the respondents agreed that Stalin was a wise leader, whereas 39 percent disagreed. Over half (56 percent) said they thought he did more good than bad; only 33 percent disagreed. And 42 percent of those surveyed agreed that people today exaggerate Stalin's role in the repressions, whereas about the same number (37 percent) disagreed. Opinions were about equally divided over whether Stalin was a cruel tyrant (43 percent agreed and 47 percent disagreed) - - a strange finding given that 70 percent of the respondents agreed that Stalin imprisoned, tortured, and killed millions of innocent people (only 16 percent disagreed with this claim). Only 28 percent felt that Stalin did not deserve credit for the Soviet victory in World War II." (3)

In light of these findings, popular interest in the revisionist take on Stalin's legacy is not surprising, only sad.

The series also has stirred up trouble in Georgia, where the television station Rustavi-2 has drawn criticism from members of the parliamentary majority for broadcasting a show that portrays Stalin in such a favorable light. The 14 February edition of Rustavi-2's news show Kurieri included an interview about the show with the station's General Director Koba Davarashvili. “This film gives us a chance to understand what Stalin was thinking about, whom he hated and whom he loved; [the film gives a chance] to find out whether Stalin was really bad – a notion which has been put in our minds for so many years - but it turns out that he wasn’t," the director said. (4)

**Repeat after me: There are no National Bolsheviks**

The newspaper Kommersant has been issued a reprimand for using the phrase "National Bolsheviks" in its coverage of events sponsored by Eduard Limonov and his followers. According to a letter from the deputy head of the Federal Service for Supervision of Compliance with the Law in the sphere of Mass Communications and Preservation of Cultural Heritage, Aleksandr Romanenkov, there is no party with such a name in Russia. Therefore, media coverage using
that phrase potentially is open to charges of spreading false public information.

(5)

The rebuff to Kommersant is part of an increased effort by authorities to crack down on the National Bolsheviks. The Moscow prosecutor's office recently announced its intention to declare Limonov's group an extremist organization and to impose a ban on its activities. (6) The group already was officially disbanded by state authorities in 2005. As lawyer Natalia Barshchevskaya queried, "What do they mean by pressing charges against an organization that doesn't formally exist?" (7)

The newest attempts to suppress the National Bolsheviks, labeled as fascists by some Russian liberals, were sparked by the group's participation in the Dissenters' March in Saint Petersburg on 3 March. The event, which was banned by city authorities, protested against Vladimir Putin and close Putin associate and Mayor of Saint Petersburg Valentina Matvienko. Estimates of the number of participants in the protest range from 1,000 by local officials, to 15,000 by the sponsoring opposition groups. OMON units were called in to shut down the march and over 100 individuals were placed under arrest, mostly for minor technicalities carrying penalties of two weeks or so in jail. (8) In further evidence of decreasing media freedom in Russia, at least one journalist lost her job because of her decision to cover the protests. (9)

The march was sponsored by an association of Russian opposition groups called Other Russia. The Other Russia coalition is comprised of a group of unlikely bedfellows: the People's Democratic Union of Mikhail Kasyanov, the United Civil Front of Garry Kasparov and the National Bolsheviks of Eduard Limonov. Kasyanov, Prime Minister from 2000-2004 and a protégé of the Yel'tsin "family," is trying (rather unsuccessfully) to position himself as the leader of a viable opposition. Chess champion Garry Kasparov long has been looking for an alternative to Putin, aligning himself with parties such as the democratic Union of
Right Forces in the past. Eduard Limonov, on the other hand, has a checkered career. Originally a poet and novelist, Limonov became engaged in ultranationalist political activism. He was imprisoned early in Putin's presidency for attempting to stage an invasion of Kazakhstan. Limonov's National Bolsheviks are truly unlikely allies for Kasyanov and Kasparov's tamer followers.

However, it may be precisely because of the improbable cooperation between the National Bolsheviks and other opposition groups that Limonov and his supporters are being hounded once again by the authorities. They are the easiest segment of the opposition to target because of their sensationalist behavior. Currently, the court date to review the case of the "non-existent" National Bolshevik party is set for April 18. The outcome, while sure to be unfavorable to Limonov's group, remains to be seen.

Source Notes:

(3) Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber, "Failing the Stalin test," Foreign Affairs, Jan/Feb 06.
(4) "Lustration amid Stalin debates," Civil Georgia, 17 Feb 07.
(5) "Russian National Bolsheviks to keep working despite ban on party name – leader," Ren TV, 30 Mar 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) "Moscow wants National Bolsheviks banned as extremists, their leader is indignant," Ekho Moskvy, 22 Mar 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) "Reprimand," Kommersant, 30 Mar 07; What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) 24 News Report, "Russia more than 100 arrested at St. Petersburg," Ren TV, 4 Mar 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

GRU in decline

During the past two years, several events have occurred that indicate that the GRU, until now considered one of Russia’s last remaining elite intelligence units, in fact has been undergoing steady decline. In March of 2004, two GRU officers carrying Secret Service, rather than diplomatic, passports were arrested in Yemen and deported to Qatar. Charged by the Qatari authorities with the assassination of former Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the detainees reportedly revealed operational secrets while under interrogation. Then, in September 2006, Georgian authorities arrested four Russian nationals, allegedly GRU operatives, who were on the verge of executing a major act of “provocation” against the Republic. As they had been in Yemen, the officers concerned apparently were working without diplomatic cover, or sufficient financial and logistical support from their superiors in Moscow. Responding to the crisis, GRU veterans claimed that the intelligence failure was a result of failure to maintain the agency’s previously “stringent” recruiting standards. The GRU now recruited “anyone at all.”

On 3 April, a report on Ekho Moskvy radio claimed that the hazing and bullying which has long plagued Russia’s conscript forces, has spread into the GRU. Apparently, senior contract soldiers are demanding daily payments in excess of R500 from junior contractees. Because these amounts exceed their salaries, junior soldiers are resorting to criminal activities—including muggings—in nearby Yekaterinburg, in order to meet the costs. The report also claimed that junior
troops are subjected to regular beatings by their superiors. (3) If this report is true—and at this juncture there is no reason to doubt its veracity—it confirms GRU veterans’ worst fears regarding recruitment. Taken together with the operational failures described above, this report indicates that GRU apparently lacks political and financial support at the highest levels of the Russian government. If GRU is unable to function, its will to resist any FSB takeover attempts will become ever harder to sustain.

**Basayev “assassination” revisited**

On 10 July 2006, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev informed President Vladimir Putin that Shamil Basayev had been killed in the course of a special operation. According to FSB sources, Basayev was tracked through his cell phone. When his location had been confirmed, a smart missile was fired, destroying the truck in which he was traveling.

The FSB’s account was disputed by Ingush President Bashir Aushev, as well as Kommersant; they claimed that the truck had exploded as the result of “careless handling of explosives” by the militants—in other words, an accident—and that the FSB had not arrived on site until 6 hours after the explosion. It seemed likely that the FSB was claiming the “kill” as a means to re-gain political capital in the Kremlin, after the debacle at Beslan. (4)

In the last few weeks, the FSB has sought to silence the doubters by releasing a detailed report in which its “targeted killing” operation is described at some length; supposedly, the FSB had succeeded in infiltrating Basayev’s gang some time before his death. The FSB’s informer apparently passed information to Moscow indicating that a second Beslan type operation was in the works. (5) This intelligence prompted action. With the mole’s information, the FSB was able to pinpoint Basayev’s location.
A team of operatives was dispatched to the scene. The driver of the truck being used to transport weapons and explosives for the terror operation was drugged, apparently by two female agents disguised as local waitresses. (6) While he was incapacitated, the FSB photographed and catalogued the equipment in the KamAZ vehicle, which included assault rifles, grenades and plastic explosives. At this time, the FSB operatives planted their own device in the truck and then returned it to its original location. (7)

Although the report does not describe how the FSB’s device was detonated, it is safe to assume—if this story is true—that a surveillance team shadowed the truck, waiting for Basayev to be collected, and that the bomb was exploded using a remote trigger device, when Basayev boarded his transportation.

The version of events as described by the FSB seems fantastic, indeed, worthy of a Hollywood script. To train an operative to infiltrate a terror cell—especially in a clan-based, tribal society—would take months, if not years, with an extremely high level of planning and low chance of success. The surveillance and “kill” teams would need to be highly trained, patient individuals, with precise, accurate information. If the press reports are to be believed, the FSB personnel indeed had done the background work, rehearsing the operation for “some time.” (8)

If the description of events carried in the press is true, then the FSB’s competency must be seriously re-evaluated. It is a possibility—however remote—that a trusted member of Basayev’s retinue was "turned," or that the FSB succeeded in an infiltration. Given the FSB’s past record however, its claims must be viewed with healthy skepticism.

Litvinenko: Berezovsky questioned…
Last month, Russian officials complained that permission had not been granted for law-enforcement officers to question suspects in the murder of Aleksandr Litvinenko in London. British authorities responded to these complaints by
explaining that the Crown Prosecution Service had imposed a delay, while it asked detectives to uncover more evidence. (9) Any delays apparently had been cleared by the last week of March, when a three-man delegation, headed by Deputy Prosecutor General Aleksandr Zvyagintsev, arrived in London. (10)

After meeting with Scotland Yard detectives and Crown Prosecution Service officials, the delegation was permitted to question exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky and Chechen “emissary” Akhmed Zakayev, at separate, secure locations. (11) While Russian officials pronounced themselves satisfied with Berezovsky’s interview, stating that “the interrogation passed off ok,” (12) the tycoon, as could be expected, gave a very different reaction. Berezovsky claimed that the investigators had been more interested in his businesses, bank accounts and companies, and had asked him about President Putin’s alleged involvement in the murder only at the end of the interview, making the whole session a complete “farce.” (13)

**While prosecutor airs “new” theory about the murder**

Several days after Berezovsky had been questioned by the Deputy Prosecutor General in London, a television program aired in Russia, and “sourced” to the Prosecutor’s office, claiming that Berezovsky had been behind the murder. A news program on Rossiya TV used an anonymous witness, “Petr,” to allege that Berezovsky had ordered Litvinenko’s death because the latter could damage his asylum case. “Petr” claimed that he was a former FSB agent, sent to kill Berezovsky. “Petr” stated that he had revealed his identity to a journalist, who had passed a recording of their conversation to Berezovsky. This tape was then used in Berezovsky’s asylum hearing to show that his life was endangered. (14)

Berezovsky has responded to the show by outing “Petr” as Vladimir Teplyuk, a Russian living in London, (15) and by stating that he intends to sue Rossiya TV. (16) It should be noted that Berezovsky did not comment on Teplyuk’s FSB status, or lack thereof.
In spite of claims to the contrary, this theory is not “new.” The claim that Litvinenko was killed to enhance Berezovsky’s asylum claims was aired by the Kremlin in November. What is new is the wheeling out of a “witness.” By any legalistic logic, airing this theory on television damages its credibility. Moreover, the Teplyuk “story” makes little sense. If Berezovsky was indeed targeted, his asylum claims were legitimate – and could not have been exposed as a “fraud” by Litvinenko. The question needs to be asked: what is Moscow’s motivation?

Source Notes:

(1) WPS Russian Political Monitor, 19 Mar 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Database. (See The NIS Observed, Volume IX, Number 05 (26 Mar 04).)
(2) Imedi TV, Tbilisi in Georgian 1500 GMT, 27 Sep 06; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis. (See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 4 (9 Nov 06).)
(3) “Bullying Reported At Russian Military Intelligence Unit,” Ekho Moskvy, in Russian, 3 Apr 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XII, Number 7 (20 Jul 06)
(5) “Shamil Basayev And The Dead Man’s Chest,” Moskovskii komsomolets, 26 Mar 07; WPS Defense and Security via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) Ibid.
(8) “Shamil Basayev And The Dead Man’s Chest,” Moskovskii komsomolets, 26 Mar 07; WPS Defense and Security via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 10 (29 Mar 07)
(11) “British Police Confirm Berezovsky, Zakayev Questioning,” ITAR-TASS, 1 Apr 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
Personnel reform...a misguided effort

This week marked the beginning of the Russian military’s spring conscription campaign. This is historic in that it is also the first recruitment campaign to enlist soldiers for eighteen months, instead of the more familiar two year period. (1) This week, President Putin signed a decree officially reducing the enlistment period even further, to only 12 months, beginning in 2008. (2) Recognizing the need for reforms as long ago as 2001, Putin also directed a gradual shift to a military comprised more of contracted professional soldiers. (3) Not surprisingly, however, young men are still not lining up by the masses in front of recruitment offices. Neither decreased enlistment terms nor a half-hearted effort toward a volunteer force are likely to unseat generations of corrupt leadership practices.

The Defense Ministry’s stated goal is a one million man military. (4) By 2008, the Russian military is expected to consist of 400,000 officers, 200,000 contract soldiers, and 400,000 conscripts. (5) Despite ambitious efforts, the initial recruiting goal of 144,000 contract volunteer soldiers was first forced down to
133,000, and then again to 125,000. (6) Moreover, the current contract soldier manning level remains at just 78,000. (7) In order to make up for these decreased recruiting goals and the failure to meet them, conscription requirements have been dramatically increased. Additionally, human rights groups have reported that conscripts are now routinely being coerced into signing contracts. These “volunteers” already are having to seek protection from abuse by their superiors. (8)

In one recent case, a contract soldier deserted from his reconnaissance battalion to escape beatings and extortion by senior soldiers. The soldier reported that “he and other draftees were actually forced to sign contracts because they were told that otherwise no money and allowances would be given to them.” (9) Ironically, even then “senior soldiers often took salaries from rookies and forced them to bring [an additional] 500 rubles a day. To get the necessary amount, the newly drafted soldiers had to…steal money from local residents.” (10)

In another case, a soldier explained to a representative of the Soldiers’ Mothers Committee the unexpected welcome he received upon arriving to his unit in St. Petersburg. After being beaten, he was given a telephone with which he was to negotiate prices and arrange for rendezvous as a male prostitute. As expected, the profits were then extorted by the more senior soldiers. Experts agree that this practice is very common and mostly goes unreported, due to the humiliating nature of this sexual abuse. (11)

State and political officials claim that shorter conscription periods will serve to minimize the number of hazing incidents. They suggest that shorter enlistments will put the soldiers on a more even playing field. (12) However, the more likely situation is that soldiers will simply reach “senior” status and become instigators with just six months experience, instead of one year. Long-held abusive practices will not disappear as long as high level leaders are both condoning and profiting from them.
Captain Viktor Bobrov, commander of a motorized infantry company, recently took his own life “to avoid embezzlement charges he claimed were concocted by his superiors to cover up their wrongdoing.” (13) In his suicide note he said, “Nobody is responsible for anything. All officers do is collect money from soldiers and their parents; all they think about is how to steal more.” (14) It’s too early to evaluate the effects of shorter conscription terms, but in January alone, 67 military personnel committed suicide. (15) This spike is almost triple the 2005 monthly average of 23.

The change to one-year enlistments brings with it a couple of other unintended negative consequences. First, since half the service length equates to twice the required number of conscripts, the Defense Ministry will need to enlist 700,000 troops next year. With only 718,000 men reaching the age of 18 in 2008, virtually all young men will be required to serve. (16) This fact will not be appreciated by the bribe-taking recruiters accustomed to exempting large numbers of young men for the right price. Additionally, a large portion of the newly eligible 18 year-olds will have conditions limiting their ability to serve. In February, “Russian Air Force commander Col Gen Vladimir Mikhailov stunned the Kremlin establishment with a blunt speech. Of the 11,000 young men drafted into the Air Force in 2006…more than 30 percent were ‘mentally unstable.’ An additional 10 percent suffered from drug or alcohol problems, while a further 15 percent were deemed ill or malnourished.” (17) So not only will the ranks be difficult to fill, but it’s very likely they will continue to be filled by young men who would rather be anywhere other than the military.

The other anticipated problem is the increased unrest likely to result as conscripts under different terms of enlistment are forced to live and work together. Troops serving two year enlistments will be apt to view it as unfair that twelve month draftees get to go home at the same time they do. (18) For this
reason, hazing incidents are likely to remain very prevalent for at least a few years during the transition.

As the title of this article implies, continued efforts at “fixing” personnel problems are aimed at the wrong target. The young, underpaid, abused, and bitter conscript can not be expected to be a catalyst for change. Instead, it’s all about leadership. And the current leadership likes things just the way they are.

The officer corps in the Russian military comprises an incredible 40 percent of the total force. (19) By any standard this is quite excessive. This distorted proportion creates a situation where there is nearly one officer for every enlisted man. For comparison purposes only, the US military officer corps represents just 15 percent of the total force. This ratio is much more typical of the rest of the world’s militaries.

Genuine reform in the Russian military is going to require correcting the ratio of officers to enlisted troops. This action alone could produce positive results. First, with fewer officers available to accomplish the mission, maybe they wouldn’t have time to victimize soldiers through the operation of their corrupt side businesses. More importantly though, the money saved by reducing the size of the officer corps would be enough to correct enlisted pay and create a more professional force.

As Russia continues its attempt to reemerge as a significant military power, it must realize that throwing money at new weapons systems and tweaking soldier conscription policies is not the answer. Effective change must begin with the leadership.

Source Notes:
(1) Kozenko, Andrei, “Young Fathers Drafted; Conscription According to New Rules is Underway,” 3 Apr 07, Kommersant via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Vasilieva, Kira, Ibid.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Ibid.
(13) Matthews, Owen, Ibid.
(14) Ibid.
(15) Ibid.
(16) Kostyukovsky, Artem, Ibid.
(18) Poroskov, Nikolai, Ibid.
(19) Vasilieva, Kira, Ibid.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces (External)
Kodori attack raises many questions
The situation in the Kodori Gorge (Georgian territory claimed by Abkhaz secessionists) was in the news again last month, with reports of a night helicopter attack and multiple artillery rounds landing in and around the Georgian-held village of Chkhalta. (1) Occurring near midnight on the 11th of March, the attack is notable due to the sophisticated avionics required to conduct it. For this reason, the Georgian government has claimed that the helicopters must have come from Russian territory and been equipped with night-vision navigation and targeting equipment. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili called this action a “dangerous and far-reaching provocation,” while Georgian Parliamentary speaker Nino Burdzhanadze said that Georgian authorities expected an “explanation of the incident” from Russia. (2) Foreign ministers from both countries discussed the incident via telephone, although no details are available on the outcome of this conversation. The Georgian foreign minister does claim, however, to have “undeniable evidence” that the attack originated in Russia. (3)

The Deputy Commander of Russia’s ground forces, Lieutenant General Valeri Yevnevich disputed the statements, claiming that helicopters from the Collective Peacekeeping Force have not flown in the Kodori Gorge since January 2000. (4) Furthermore, he alleged that it would be impossible for helicopters based in Russia to attack the Kodori Gorge, due to the high elevation of the Caucasian Ridge that separates the two countries. And finally, General Yevnevich claimed that artillery fire into the Kodori Gorge was not possible, at least from Tkvarcheli (where the Georgians state the fire originated), due to the intervening terrain. The matter was simply one of “small automatic weapons fire,” as observed by the 106th and 107th observation posts that night. (5)
All of these points may be relevant, but the Georgians, too, have some significant evidence, although it may not qualify as irrefutable. They state that parts of AT-16 Ataka missiles, which were produced in Russia in 2005, were found at the sight of the attack. The AT-16 is a radio command guided missile used on the Mi-28N and possibly Mi-24PN attack helicopters. Both of these systems are equipped with advanced night-fighting equipment, but would they be able to climb to the altitude required to over fly the Caucasian Ridge? The answer is “Yes,” but is also irrelevant, as there are many other routes to accomplish the same mission. (6) In fact, the nearest Russian airfield to the Kodori Gorge is not north across the Caucasian ridge, but west at Sochi—Adler, which is less than 120 nautical miles from the gorge, across relatively low terrain.

The UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) Joint Fact-Finding Group (JFFG), for its part, has examined the site of the attack and stated that “additional information” is needed before it will be able to issue a final statement. (7) Although UNOMIG officials examined more than seventeen different impact points and the damaged administration building of the Abkhaz government-in-exile, they did not comment on the Georgian claim of AT-16 missiles. They have, however, collected evidence to determine the type of ordnance used in the attack and have done crater analysis to determine from which direction the attack originated. (8)

Although Russian ordnance in this area of the world is a very common sight, only Russia would have the motive and the capability to conduct this type of attack, very specifically aimed at the government-in-exile established by the Georgians after their “police action” of last July. Military expert Temur Iakobashvili claims that UNOMIG “might prefer to stay neutral on the issue” because it must represent many sides and is having difficulty reaching a consensus. The possibility exists, he admits, that UNOMIG simply may need more time to finish the investigation. (9) The fact that UNOMIG feels the need to arrive at “consensus” during a fact-finding mission, however, does seem strange and
throws into question UNOMIG’s objectivity. Delaying the release of the JFFG’s results also may be attributed to the upcoming review of the UNOMIG mandate, which occurs once every six months and is currently scheduled for the 10th of April. The group was originally supposed to issue a report during the week of 19-24 March. (10)

Regardless of the identity of the true perpetrators of the March 11th attack in the upper Kodori Gorge, a few things seem clear. It’s obvious that the target of the attack was the Georgian-installed government. The fact that the building was not completely destroyed is notable, but without further information, it is difficult to tell whether this was an intentional limitation on the use of force. The key will be whether or not the building was damaged by artillery fire or by AT-16 missiles. If the former, then it is conceivable that this was simply the less-than-optimal result achieved by an unsophisticated weapon. If the building was hit by the AT-16, however, which is a highly accurate, precision-guided weapon, then the limited damage might be assessed as intentional.

Also glaringly obvious is the Russian assertion that “only small arms fire” was observed on that night by the 106th and 107th observation posts. At least 17, and possibly up to 29, weapons exploded in the Kodori Gorge that night, all of them big enough to leave a crater. (11) Even if these weapons were not launched by helicopters, it would be impossible for a trained observer (or even an untrained one) to mistake this type of high explosive power for small arms fire. The soldiers at these two posts are either extremely inept or extremely biased, but whichever the case, UNOMIG’s effectiveness is seriously questioned. In any case, this incident seems to portend future events with the onset of the spring thaw.

Source Notes:
Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Alexey Dynkin

Crisis tests Russo-Ukrainian relations
On Friday, April 6, Russian President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart, Viktor Yushchenko, the main topic of which was the ongoing political crisis in Ukraine. According to Putin’s press service, the Ukrainian crisis is “…causing serious concern and worry due to the potential negative consequences it could have for the Ukrainian economy and social sector, and for the ongoing and consistent development of Russian-
It is hardly surprising, of course, that the recent events in Ukraine should be watched closely and discussed in Ukraine’s neighbor to the east. Earlier, the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed concern in a manner similar to the president’s, suggesting on April 3 that "a compromise in Ukraine should be heeded by all sides in the interests of the stability of Ukrainian society." (3) Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking during an official visit to Armenia, even offered to help – though taking care to mention that “the final decision is up to Ukraine.” (4) His offer of help, if asked by Ukrainians, was interpreted by some as a threat to intervene, à la Hungary 1956.

Not all, however, are this oblique about where their sympathies lie. On the same day that the two presidents spoke, the Duma “overwhelmingly” supported a resolution calling Yushchenko’s decision on April 2 to dissolve the Ukrainian parliament “unconstitutional” and warning that the Ukrainian president’s actions were destabilizing the country. (5) Boris Gryzlov, president of the Duma, warned of "risks leading to clashes between citizens in the streets," (6) while Communist Party leader Gennadi Zyuganov referred to the recent crisis as "a second wave of orange leprosy." (7) Andrei Kokoshin, head of the Duma’s committee on CIS affairs, was likewise unequivocal, noting that the current crisis really began in November 2004, when “the Orange forces trampled on the country's constitution and when the foundation of political instability was laid.” (8)

Neither was such alarmist language and such contempt for the “orange forces” limited to government circles. An analytical article in the online daily Kommersant on April 3 compared the current situation in Ukraine to that in Moscow in October
1993, noting reports in the Ukrainian media that special police detachments from the Donetsk region had been brought into Kiev in buses. (9) Zygar concludes the article by warning that “it is clear that dissolving the Upper Rada could lead to Ukraine itself dissolving into chaos.” (10)

On April 5, Vladimir Solovyev, as part of the K Baryeru television program on NTV Mir, hosted a debate between SPS party leader Boris Nemtsov and Konstantin Zatulin of United Russia about what role, if any, Russia should play in the Ukrainian crisis. Nemtsov, who had supported the pro-Yushchenko forces in 2004, now made it very clear that he does not support Yushchenko’s decision to dissolve the parliament. He also indicated his disapproval of Yulia Tymoshenko, accusing her of ruining the Ukrainian economy through excessive meddling and stating that he would have recommended dismissing her, had he been Yushchenko’s adviser. (11) As to what the Russian position should be, however, Nemtsov argued for a hands-off approach, declaring that is "not for us, nor for you, nor for me to get involved." (12) Ironically, Nemtsov, supposedly a member of the Russian opposition, found himself applauding Putin’s approach to the Ukrainian crisis—calling it “more careful and wiser” than in 2004 (13)—in conversation with a member of the pro-presidential party. For his part, Zatulin was rather dismissive of the achievements of Ukraine’s “orange forces,” and at one point rolled his eyes sarcastically when Nemtsov mentioned the development of democracy in Ukraine and how Russia should take a lesson from it. Zatulin’s position on Russia’s approach to the situation did not differ in any remarkable way from Nemtsov's, except that he stated, rather vaguely, that Russia should not permit any “outside interference” (presumably Western) in Ukrainian affairs. (14) Thus, while the debate prompted a sometimes heated exchange over differing interpretations of developments in the neighboring country, there was general agreement as to the role Russia should play, and it tended to support the position currently taken by the president and the Foreign Ministry.
Nemtsov is correct that, when compared to 2004, the official Russian reaction to the current Ukrainian crisis is different. It is, as Nemtsov said, more “measured and careful,” but also much less active. It is notable, for instance, that prior to Putin’s telephone conversation with Yushchenko on Friday, the Ukrainian president had already spoken with EU Foreign Relations Commissioner Benito Farrerro-Waldner and with Lithuanian President Waldas Adamkus. (15) When Putin did finally act, he was careful to speak first with Yushchenko and not with Yanukovich – a gesture of recognition of Yushchenko’s status as president.

In a somewhat paradoxical turn of events, experience has proven that democracy in Ukraine, Zatulin’s eye-rolling notwithstanding, actually tends to favor a pro-Russian orientation, as has been demonstrated by the resurgence of Yanukovich’s Party of Regions, since the Orange Revolution. If that is indeed the case, then whether or not Yushchenko wins this particular battle and succeeds in holding another round of elections is of no great consequence to Ukraine’s orientation vis-à-vis Russia, since the Party of Regions may simply rebound. It also means that in terms of political interference, Russia should heed a policy of “the less, the better,” with regard to keeping Ukraine inclined toward it. The question is whether the current policy of restraint will continue, or whether the temptation to intervene—perhaps, as Zatulin indicated, out of concern for “outside interference”—will become too great to resist.

Meanwhile, there are signs that Yushchenko may be softening the stance he had announced on April 2. It has recently become known that, following Easter services in the Vladimir cathedral, Yushchenko announced that the early elections he had scheduled for May 27 would be postponed indefinitely (pending a decision by the Constitutional Court). (16) According to other reports, Yushchenko repeatedly has denied that elections would be delayed. Since, unfortunately, the details of the telephone conversation between the two presidents two nights before probably will never be known, one can only speculate about whether or not Putin’s intervention had any effect on
Yushchenko’s change of heart. It may be that the Yanukovych camp will have no need for any Russian support after all: Yushchenko himself may ensure its triumph.

Source Notes:

(2) Ibid.
(3) “Russia concerned over Ukraine political crisis,” 3 Apr 07, Agence France Presse via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Ibid.
(6) “Russia concerned over Ukraine political crisis,” 3 Apr 07, Agence France Presse via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) Ibid.
(9) “Yushchenko Reaches the End of the Line,” by Mikhail Zygar, 3 Apr 07, Kommersant (online version) via http://kommersant.com/p755398/r_544/Ukraine_Yushchenko_Yanukovych_dissolution_parliament/.
(10) Ibid.
(11) “TV debates Russia's right to interfere in Ukrainian crisis,” 5 Apr 07, BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(12) Ibid.
(13) Ibid.
(14) Ibid.
Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Creelea Henderson

Armenian elections: RIP Andranik Markarian, romantic pragmatist
There is probably no opportune moment to die, but the heart attack that took the life of Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian on March 25 could not have come at a worse time for Armenian politics. With the death of Markarian, former Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian was appointed acting prime minister on April 4, a post that he had hoped to win in upcoming parliamentary elections. The May 12 date of the country’s elections is fast approaching, and the scrum underway between the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) and its newly formed rival, Bargavach Hayastan (BH), or Prosperous Armenia party, is merely a prelude to next year’s presidential elections. In the pre-election tussle between pro-government factions, Makarian was a prime mediator who labored unobtrusively to align the ruling HHK party with the agenda of Armenia’s most powerful figures, President Robert Kocharian and Defense Minister Sarkisian. Now that Sarkisian occupies the premiership, he may find that his early appointment has confounded his earlier designs to line up support for a presidential bid in 2008. Without the cooperation of Markarian to ameliorate intra-party strife, Sarkisian faces a wary and divided pro-government coalition.

Loyalty proved a prudent career strategy for Markarian, who won his appointment in May 2000 by defecting to the president’s camp in the chaos following the assassination of his predecessor, the late Prime Minister Vazgen Sarsian, on the floor of parliament in October 1999. (1) In the years thereafter, Makarian gained distinction as the longest-serving prime minister in the short history of independent Armenia. His long service is testament to his popularity, as was the
outpouring of sympathy from global leaders at his passing. In a statement issued by the US chargé d’affaires in Yerevan, Makarian was described as a valuable partner of the United States: “We honor Prime Minister Markarian's lifelong contributions to Armenian life, from his work with the dissident National Unity Party during the 1960s and 1970s, through independent Armenia's emergence from Soviet rule, and as the head of government since 2000.” (2) Condolences arrived from the Kremlin as well, where President Putin addressed his regrets to President Kocharian in particular, for the loss of a loyal minister. (3) Markarian’s stabilizing influence on Armenian politics was widely acknowledged, and his loyalty to the government of Kocharian will be sorely missed in the tumultuous lead-up to parliamentary and presidential elections.

Markarian was a pivotal figure holding together the contentious factions within his ruling HHK party, while balancing the growing power of the rival BH party. In the pre-election power shuffle he was cast to play a key role as placeholder for former Defense Minister Sarkisian, who planned to use the premiership as a stepping stone en route to the presidential office in 2008. In exchange for accepting a demotion within the HHK, of which he was the nominal head, Markarian was to be handed the post of parliamentary speaker, following parliamentary elections in May. The political bargain would have amounted to a double victory for Sarkisian, to whom the current parliamentary speaker and veteran HHK member, Tigran Torosian, is an untested and unreliable ally. Signs that Markarian might have been a willing pawn in the former defense minister’s presidential gambit began to emerge as early as the summer of 2006, when his authority as HHK party leader began to wane with the ascendance of Sarkisian. By January 2007, Markarian admitted that he would lose his post as prime minister, following May elections. By way of explanation he told reporters, “I think romantically but am a pragmatist.” (4)

The appointment of Sarkisian as interim prime minister may ultimately prove disadvantageous to his presidential designs. As minister of defense, he
exercised a free hand in pursuing political and economic interests, with discretion over large shares of government spending. (5) Though his former position lacked the prominence of the premiership, Sarkisian faced less party opposition as defense minister than he will in the halls of parliament, where his rise to power within the HHK already has exacerbated tensions between his “old guard” and loyalists to the late Prime Minister Markarian. (6) The impending election date of May 12 does not afford Sarkisian much time to consolidate his control within the party and to contain the growing influence of Armenia’s leading opposition party, the BH.

Outmaneuvering the BH may well prove to be the simpler of the two tasks. Indeed, the opposition challenge may even provide the prime minister with a convenient means to unite the contentious factions of the HHK. The suggestion that the BH poses a real threat to Sarkisian’s presidential ambitions is of doubtful merit. The Prosperous Armenia party, founded in December 2005 by oligarch Gagik Tsarukian, is firmly allied with President Kocharian, and is unlikely to challenge his hand-picked successor to the executive office. Although it has positioned itself as an opposition party by co-opting cultural and political dissidents, the BH lacks a well-defined ideological or policy profile to mark it off from its rivals; in his founding statement, Tsarukian explained his decision to play a substantive role in Armenian politics in non-committal terms by saying, “I see some unsolved problems in both the socioeconomic and political fields. I believe that our party, which will be a party of strong and clean people, will be able to make its contribution to solving those problems.” (7) Although the party claims a constituency of 370,000 “strong and clean” members (roughly ten percent of the total population of Armenia), (8) the power of the BH is limited by a bland policy program spelled out in a 33 page manifesto, the prodigality of which undermines its very credibility. (9) Impeded by a poorly-defined policy profile, the BH resembles nothing so much as a parliamentary faction, engineered to advance the careers of loyalists and to serve the government as a straw-man, drawing support away from the country’s weak and divided opposition parties. An
Armenian journalist critical of the government’s mismanagement of the electoral process characterized Tsarukian as an unwitting Trojan horse, on which Sarkisian will ride into the presidential office. (10) Although the metaphor of a Trojan horse is ill-suited to its object, paper tiger being perhaps a more apt representation of the role of the BH party in electoral maneuverings, the author’s accusation of political connivance is clear enough. Domestic developments are unlikely to affect Armenia’s close relationship with Moscow.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

Kyrgyz president faces mounting pressure to resign
Once again Kyrgyzstan is in the throes of a deep political crisis, this time pitting former Prime Minister Feliks Kulov against President Kurmanbek Bakiev, as the country’s two predominant opposition movements (Kulov’s “United Front For A Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan” and “For Reforms!”) call for a new constitution, early presidential elections and for President Bakiev’s resignation. It is the latter demand that threatens to plunge Kyrgyzstan into a new round of civil unrest. Over the past few weeks the president has taken a number of steps to appease the opposition, including appointing opposition leader Almaz Atambaev (chair of the Social Democratic party) as prime minister and establishing a “working group” to begin considering (new) constitutional reform. However, he refuses to step down or call early elections and consequently, opposition leaders are moving forward with their plans to stage large-scale protests in Bishkek on 11 April, à la the Tulip Revolution. (1) Depending on how Bakiev’s supporters in the southern provinces respond (Bakiev is from Jalalabad Province and one of his brothers, Akmat, is said to be the unofficial “governor, prosecutor, and khan” of Jalalabad) (2), 11 April could bring widespread unrest throughout the country.
Following calls for compromise by various parliamentarians, NGO leaders and Prime Minister Atambaev himself, the “United Front For A Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan” offering President Bakiev the semblance of an olive branch by announcing on 5 April that if Bakiev accepted the draft of the revised constitution, which United Front leaders would had given to State Secretary Adaham Madumarov by the next day, the 11 April demonstrations would be called off. (3) This rather half-hearted attempt at peace-making was rejected unequivocally on 6 April, when Bakiev told the Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper that he would not submit the opposition’s draft constitution to parliament, because such an act would violate current constitutional law. The president said that he supported constitutional reform, but only if it was carried out in accordance with the law, which stipulates that a draft must first be submitted by a “working group” to the president, who submits it to parliament. Upon receiving parliamentary approval, the document must then be endorsed by the Constitutional Court. (4)

The working group for constitutional reform had been established one day prior to the president’s newspaper interview, made up of the following members: Prime Minister Almaz Atambaev, who chairs the group; Ishenbai Abdurazakov, former state secretary; Dzhanyl Alieva, head of the Pervomai district court in Bishkek; Azimbek Beknazarov, formerly a leading member of the “For Reforms!” movement and now co-chair of the “For One Kyrgyzstan” movement; Bektur Zulpiev, chief of a department within the presidential administration; Ishak Masaliev, leader of the Communist party; Isa Omurkulov, member of parliament and until recently a leader of “For Reforms!”; Roza Otunbaeva, co-chair of “For One Kyrgyzstan”; Nurlan Sadykov, director of the Institute of Constitutional Policy, Dooronbek Sadyrbaev, co-founder of “For One Kyrgyzstan”; and Tursunbek Akun, chair of the Human Rights Commission in the presidential administration. The current leadership of “For Reforms!” and the United Front refused to nominate any representatives to the group, having already presented its demands to the president’s administration. (5) Past attempts at constitutional reform have dragged on for months, but this time a draft document was ready in
just five days: on 10 April, MP Dooronbek Sadyrbaev announced that the draft was complete and included amendments previously proposed by Feliks Kulov and other leaders of the United Front and “For Reforms!” movements on the issue of power-sharing between the executive and legislative branches of government. (6) Later that day, Prime Minister Atambaev told the press that Bakiev had signed the draft and passed it on to the Jogorku Kengesh (parliament), which will begin considering the document 11 April. The prime minister promised that as soon as the new constitution was approved, its measures would be implemented (7) and then went on to declare that the opposition’s demands had been met and there was no longer any need for confrontation. (8) Compared with the first eighteen months of Bakiev’s rule, this sudden spate of activity represents a virtual whirlwind of political reform.

In his 10 April television address President Bakiev criticized the opposition more directly, stating “All of opposition's demands have not only been heard, they have been met. Today, there are no grounds or reasons to call people out into the streets. That is why I state that the people who started this are responsible for any illegal actions and riots.” (9) He castigated the opposition leaders for rejecting his recent invitations to discuss their demands with him and for boycotting the constitutional working group, and then accused them of planning to forcibly oust him from power, “A strategy of overthrowing the regime illegally through a state coup is being implemented.” (10) However, the opposition shows no signs of backing down and continues to call for new presidential elections and Bakiev’s resignation. United Front spokesperson Emil Aliev told the media, “The authorities want to smooth things out on the eve of our protests. But it's not going to work. Our demands are the same: Bakiyev's resignation and early presidential elections.” (11)

Preparations are well underway in Bishkek to provide shelter for the 50,000 opposition supporters who are expected to arrive by 11 April. 70 felt yurts and 30 tents are being erected in Bishkek’s main square, (12) and the United Front's
press service has posted an official schedule and route for the various groups of
demonstrators to follow – opposition supporters are to gather in a number of
different spots at noon and approach Ala-Too Square in seven columns. (13) At
least 100 people have arrived already from the oblasts of Naryn and Issyk-Kul.
Law enforcement personnel are making their own preparations and have erected
large tents to house Interior Ministry troops east and west of the government
buildings. (14) Kulov has assured his supporters that he is certain the police will
not use force against the demonstrators because many of them agree with the
protesters’ demands. (15) Of course, he also still may command some influence
over the security services, harking back to the days when he headed the Interior
Ministry.

Anti-government protests in the northeastern provinces began as early as 9 April
in Talas (provincial capital of Talas Oblast’), Ak-Taala, Chayek, At-Bashi,
Kochkor (all in Naryn Oblast’), Cholpon-Ata, Karakol, Balykchy (all in Issyk-Kul
Oblast’), in the town of Chuy-Tokmak, and in Panfilov, Moscow and Alamedin
Districts (all in Chuy Oblast’). (16) Opposition sympathizers from these areas, as
well as from the southern oblasts of Jalalabad and Batken are all expected to
tavel to Bishkek for the 11 April rally. (17)

The former prime minister and his supporters have been absolutely steadfast in
their resolve to force the president to meet every last one of their demands,
including their demand for his resignation. This resolve is no doubt fueled by
months’ of pent-up frustration with the excruciatingly slow pace of reform and
their own inability to achieve meaningful change by using established political
procedures – when parliament finally succeeded in revising the constitution last
November, nearly all of the revisions were nullified a month later. Thus, it is
small wonder that once he was no longer part of the government, Kulov would
turn to extra-legal means to achieve his ambitions. His new opposition
movement has found support from a surprisingly large number of
parliamentarians and other opposition figures, as well as from a number of
government officials. In fact, rumor has it that he has also garnered the support of the Kremlin and that a candidate to replace Bakiev is waiting in Moscow. In an interview with AKIpress on 5 April, Deputy Speaker of the Jogorku Kengesh Kubanychbek Isabekov, stated that Kyrgyzstan soon would be receiving a visit from Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, to address the subject of installing a 40-year old former security services official with the surname Aliev as head of Kyrgyzstan’s government, due to Moscow’s dissatisfaction with Kurmanbek Bakiev. (18)

Whether or not there is any truth to this rumor, Bakiev seems to have exhausted his support both inside and outside his own country, except for in his home oblast’ of Jalalabad, where his family still exerts a great deal of influence. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbaev criticized Bakiev’s inability to preserve his country’s stability, in a television interview on the situations in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. (19) After having ridden into office on a wave of reformist euphoria, Bakiev has proven himself to be a stubborn and ineffective leader, unwilling to implement political reform if it meant relinquishing any of the presidency’s powers to other branches of government. His recent scramble to carry out several of the opposition’s demands (demands that date back to the beginning of his presidency) only serves to underscore his desperation to retain his post, a desperation which Kulov and the “For Reforms!” leaders plainly see. Bakiev’s frantic attempts to placate the opposition are clearly too little, too late – Kulov and company seem to sense they have him on the ropes, and it is highly unlikely that they will stop at anything less than total victory, i.e. Bakiev’s resignation. The one remaining question is whether or not Bakiev’s desperation will cause him to cling to his position at any cost, or if he will finally allow the welfare of his country’s citizens to supersede his personal ambitions.

Source Notes:


(6) “Kyrgyz opposition to turn over to president draft constitution,” 10 Apr 07, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(9) “Bakiyev warns opposition leaders against riots,” 10 Apr 07, Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(10) “Regime change could be attempted in Kyrgyzstan – Bakiyev,” 10 Apr 07, Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(11) Boykewich, “Kyrgyz president offers deal ahead of protests,” Ibid.

(12) “Kyrgyz Opposition supporters are putting up tents in central square,” 10 Apr 07, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Ukraine’s politicians settle in for the long haul

On 2 April, President Viktor Yushchenko’s signature on a decree dissolving the parliament began a period of heated rhetoric, posturing and uncertainty. On 10 April, however, Yushchenko altered his position in favor of negotiation – and perhaps some type of agreement.

In talks with Yanukovych, Yushchenko reportedly offered to “suspend” his decree, in order to allow more time for new elections to be prepared. They are currently set for 27 May. (1)

The task for Yushchenko today, however, is to ensure that any agreement does not jeopardize the position he has carefully carved out for himself and his allies.
When he dissolved parliament, Yushchenko accused members of parliament of conducting a “fraudulent policy of intrigues and betrayals,” in order to unconstitutionally increase the majority coalition. He called this a “threat to our country and nation.” (2)

The move signified a strong return to political relevance for Yushchenko, who had become isolated and seen his powers drastically reduced.

Parliament immediately refused to uphold the presidential decree. MPs called protestors out onto the streets, warned of “a split” between the East and West of the country, appealed the decree to the Constitutional Court, announced a boycott of the new elections, and suggested that new presidential elections be held.

But on 9 April, both Yanukovych and Yushchenko sounded a conciliatory note. In an interview published in the Polish newspaper Rzeczpospolita, Yanukovych called for compromise and seemed to accept the idea of a new election, but not on 27 May. “Elections cannot take place on 27th May, as President Yushchenko is demanding,” he said. If, of course, we are talking of honest and democratic elections - it is necessary to decide on many technical questions, [and] form election commissions.” (3)

Yushchenko, for his part, announced a 15 point compromise plan, which included everything from committing to pass certain legislation, to “restoring a balance” among various political forces, to supporting the idea of new elections. It was unclear, though, just what Yushchenko hoped to accomplish with most of these points and what he is prepared to sacrifice, in order to reach an agreement.

In response to a question from reporters, Yushchenko suggested that he is willing to talk about the possibility of pushing the new election back, in order to
provide better preparation time. “This can be discussed in the negotiations,” he said. (4)

However, in order to move the elections back, Yushchenko would have to either rescind or reissue his decree. Article 77 of the Ukrainian constitution says, “Extraordinary elections [to the] Supreme Soviet of Ukraine are appointed by [the] President of Ukraine and conducted [within] the period of sixty days from the day of publishing of the decision about stopping of plenary powers of the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine.” (5)

The decree was published on April 3. The current election is set for 27 May, or 55 days after the publication of the decree. Adding the constitutional five extra days would place the election on a Friday.

This would lead to a host of questions, most notably regarding a string of rash legislation “passed” by parliament, following its dissolution. Parliament has rescinded some of these “laws,” in an attempt to convince Yushchenko to capitulate. It is unclear, however, how parliament would make use of any extra time provided to it, particularly since Speaker Oleksandr Moroz’s Socialist Party may not reach the next parliament.

Yanukovych also likely is looking for a guarantee that Yushchenko will not stand in the way of his reappointment as prime minister, if his party should secure a parliamentary majority following the election. Furthermore, he and his allies no doubt would like guarantees that their business interests will not be undercut or targeted for investigation, should the opposition form a majority. Agreements for immunity on any questionable activities conducted by government ministers also likely will be requested, as will concessions regarding possible posts in a new opposition-led government, in regional administrations, or in the country’s industrial monopolies.
On 11 April, Yanukovych ratcheted up the rhetoric again when he insisted that he would agree only to parliamentary elections held simultaneously with presidential elections. (6) It is likely that Yushchenko would lose these elections.

Yushchenko must be careful not to give away too much, however. His tendency to do so in the past allowed Yanukovych to isolate him and undermine his authority. It also allowed a return of certain tactics that were thought to have been banished during the Orange Revolution of 2004. These tactics included pressure (both legal and physical) on media outlets and what appeared to be open intimidation of political opponents.

As noted previously in The Analyst, during March representatives from Ukraine’s Prosecutor-General’s Office (PGO) suddenly searched the apartment of former Interior Minister and former Orange Revolution organizer Yuriy Lutsenko. The parliament then asked the PGO to investigate former Prime Minister and Orange Revolution leader Yulia Tymoshenko’s dealings as head of a gas intermediary in the mid-1990s. Both Lutsenko and Tymoshenko had announced that they would lead major protest actions in the spring. (7)

At the same time, the Ukrainian National Television Channel 1 cancelled its only political debate program, Toloka, after Tymoshenko and Vyacheslav Kyrylenko of Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine bloc appeared on the program. This followed on the heels of a number of incidents of reported pressure against local and regional media outlets. (8) These tactics do not suggest a government that is moving toward consolidating an open, transparent democracy.

Yushchenko so far is in the “power” position. He seized the initiative on 2 April and has not released it. Yanukovych’s allies have been unable to mount effective street protests, never matching the numbers promised. The decision by five Constitutional Court judges to recuse themselves from the case, and the delay in the Court’s hearing of the arguments does not bode well for a quick
decision – or perhaps for any decision at all. Therefore, the President’s decree remains in effect.

Yushchenko has the chance to protect the gains made by Ukraine in 2004. Yanukovych has the chance to transform his party into an organization truly representing the will of his voters. The true goals of both will become clear as their negotiations continue.

Source Notes:

(1) Associated Press, 1352 EST, 11 Apr 07 via www.ctv.ca.
(3) Rzeczpospolita, 10 Apr 07, republished on the Ukrainian Government Portal via http://www.kmu.gov.ua/. See also Foreign Notes via http://foreignnotes.blogspot.com/ for the English translation of parts of the article.
(4) “President considers delaying date of extraordinary elections,” Korrespondent.net, 10 Apr 07 via http://www.korrespondent.net/main/185995.
(6) Associated Press, 1352 EST, 11 Apr 07 via www.ctv.ca.
(8) Ibid.